

## CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS RESOURCES

### EXPERIENCING A TRAUMATIC EVENT

Critical Incident Stress (CIS) is stress from any event powerful enough to overcome the normal coping mechanisms of persons exposed to the event. Even though the event is over, people often experience a strong reaction hours and even days following the event.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

- Is often sudden and unexpected
- May disrupt your sense of control
- May disrupt your beliefs, values and basic assumptions about people and the world
- May leave you feeling a sense of physical or emotional loss
- May overwhelm your normal mechanisms for dealing with stress
- May leave you experiencing signs and symptoms of critical incident stress

#### EVENTS MOST LIKELY TO CAUSE CIS

- Multi-casualty incident (*with/without fatalities*)
- Injury or death due to an emergency or event where you felt that your life was in danger
- Suicide or sudden death
- Car accident
- Events involving children
- Helper knows or is related to the victim

### RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF STRESS

Our bodies often react to CIS before we are aware of it. Here are some common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction:

#### PHYSICAL

(\*indicates need for immediate medical attention)

- \*Chest pain, \*difficulty breath, chills
- Rapid heart rate, rapid breathing
- Increased blood pressure
- \*Dizziness, \*profuse sweating
- Fatigue, muscle aches, decreased sex drive
- Upset stomach, diarrhea
- Feeling uncoordinated
- Sleep disturbances
- \*Tremors (lips, hands)

#### EMOTIONAL

- Anxiety, fear, guilt, anger
- Depression, sadness, irritability
- Feeling lost, feeling isolated
- Worried about others, sense of shock
- Feeling numb or abandoned
- Exaggerated startle response

#### THINKING

- Slowed thinking, confusion
- Memory problems
- Re-living the event (flashbacks)
- Distressing dreams
- Difficulty focusing or concentrating
- Feeling disoriented
- Questioning faith, personal values and beliefs

#### BEHAVIORAL

- Limiting contact with others
- Substance abuse, increased smoking
- Increased blood pressure
- Vacant stare
- Acting out anger
- Change in appetite

The signs of stress listed above are normal reactions of normal people to traumatic and stressful events. If you are exhibiting signs of stress or are simply concerned about the way you are feeling, contact a healthcare professional or the resources outlined in this pamphlet.

### SELF-CARE

The following may help you deal more effectively with the emotions you experience after a traumatic event.

- Get plenty of rest
- Talk to friends and family about your experience
- Have someone stay with you for a time
- Eat well-balanced, regular meals
- Drink plenty of water
- Keep physically active
- Re-establish your normal routine
- Avoid mood-altering chemicals and substances (alcohol/medications)

Talk to people about how you are doing. Give yourself permission to feel your emotions and share your feelings with others. Feel free not to talk repetitively about the event.

### ENLIST THE HELP OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Ask them to read this pamphlet:

*Your loved one has been involved in an emotionally charged event known as a critical incident. No one is immune to Critical Incident Stress (CIS). You can help them by becoming familiar with some of the signs and symptoms associated with CIS as outlined in this pamphlet.*

Tips when offering support and assistance:

- Listen carefully, but give private time
- Help with everyday tasks
- Reassure them that they did everything possible and made the best decision they could at the time, regardless of the outcome.
- Avoid remarks like: "I know exactly how you feel," or "You are lucky it wasn't worse."
- Provide encouragement by telling them that you are sorry such an event took place and you want to understand and help them.

### Reach out for confidential, professional assistance:

DISTRESS CENTRE (24 hour line)  
403-266-4357 (HELP)

Ask to be connected with:

Mobile Response Team (MRT) or Psychiatric Outreach Response Team (PORT) | 9:30am - 9:30pm | 7 days a week | 365 days a year